

1994

VNPs, Finiteness and External Arguments

Eithne Guilfoyle
University of Calgary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/nels>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Guilfoyle, Eithne (1994) "VNPs, Finiteness and External Arguments," *North East Linguistics Society*. Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/nels/vol24/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Linguistics Students Association (GLSA) at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in North East Linguistics Society by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

VNPs, Finiteness and External Arguments*

Eithne Guilfoyle

University of Calgary

0. Introduction

In this paper we examine the structure of nonfinite clauses in Modern Irish and show that they provide evidence for two recent claims pertaining to the structure of VP. First, that the VP is a bipartite structure where the lower maximal projection is headed by a verbal noun (Travis 1991), second that the VP contains a functional category AspP (Travis 1991, Ramchand 1993). We use these two assumptions to explain the word order of Irish nonfinite clauses, and a number of other puzzling facts of Irish syntax. We also claim that Southern Irish dialects lack the upper VP position, and consequently place certain restrictions on the appearance of lexical subjects in nonfinite clauses. We then extend the analysis to explain certain Old English infinitival clauses.

In section 1, we discuss the word order of Irish finite and nonfinite clauses focusing our attention on the two major dialects, Northern and Southern Irish. We note the word order differences in the dialects, and the restriction on lexical subjects in Southern Irish. In section 2 we present an analysis of the clause structure of Irish, and argue that the major difference between Northern and Southern Irish is the lack of an upper VP, and hence an external argument position in Southern Irish. In section 3 we use morphological evidence to support our claim that nonfinite clauses are headed by a VN, and show that our analysis sheds new light on three well known properties of Irish syntax: the lack of complementary distribution of PRO and lexical NP, the impossibility of pronominal object postposing in nonfinite clauses, and the lack of 'double subject' constructions in Southern dialects. In section 4 we compare our analysis with Ramchand's (1993) analysis of Scots Gaelic clause structure. Finally, in section 5, we suggest that the analysis developed for Southern Irish can be extended to the infinitival complements of perception and causative verbs in Old English, and argue that these too are headed by a VN. Our conclusions are presented in Section 6.

1.0 Word Order in Irish Finite and Nonfinite clauses

Most treatments of VSO languages within generative grammar assume that the underlying word order is SVO (Emonds 1981, McCloskey 1983, Sproat 1985, Guilfoyle 1990a,b Bobaljik & Carnie 1993), and that the surface VSO order is derived by movement of the verb to clause-initial position. Under this view, we expect that when the verb fails to move (for whatever reason) we should get a surface SVO order. Many VSO languages do in fact allow SVO order, although they vary widely in the extent to which this possibility is allowed.

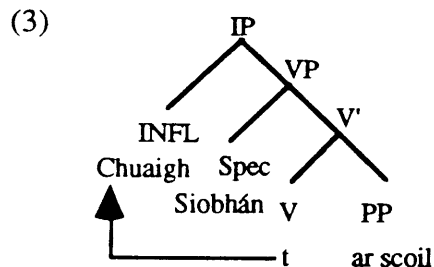
All dialects of Irish show VSO order in tensed clauses as shown in (1) and (2) below:

- (1) D'fhán Seán sa bhaile inniu
stay-PAST Seán at home today
'Sean stayed at home today'

- (2) Chuaigh Siobhán ar scoil
go-PAST Siobhan on school
'Siobhan went to school'

Under standard assumptions the verb raises to Infl from within the VP to assign nominative case to the subject. We would expect then, that in nontensed clauses the verb should remain within the VP and SVO order should surface. As we shall see below, SVO order is possible only in Southern Irish dialects, and then only in formal registers.

We assume that subjects are generated in Spec of VP, and may remain there in VSO languages. The verb raises to the head of a functional projection external to VP, we will assume this is IP.



When the clause is non-tensed the verb remains within the VP. The VP is headed by a nonfinite verb form which is referred to in traditional grammars as a verbal noun (VN). The VN may be preceded by preverbal particle *a* under conditions which vary from one dialect to another as will be seen below. For the purposes of later discussion, we note that Irish, unlike English, has a productive rule of accusative case-assignment to the subject of a nonfinite clause, and that case-assignment takes place independent of any outside governor (Chung and McCloskey 1987). Thus the response to the question in (4) is fully grammatical in all dialects of Irish:

- (4) Q: Caidé a chuir sin in do cheann?
what COMP put that in your head
'What put that in your head?'

A: Tú a bheith 'do luí
you be-VN lying down
'The fact that you were lying down'
(literally 'You to be lying there')

VNPS FINITENESS AND EXTERNAL ARGUMENTS

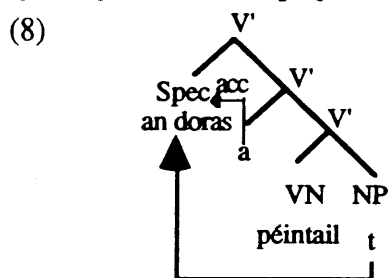
Turning now to dialect differences, the language divides into two major dialect groups, Northern and Southern Irish. There are significant differences between the dialects at the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels; we concentrate here on the syntactic properties of nonfinite clauses in the dialects starting with the Northern group.

1.1 Northern Irish

In Northern dialects nonfinite clauses show SOV order, as can be seen in (5) to (7) below. In (5) we have an intransitive clause, in (6) a control structure, and in (7) a transitive clause. Note that in (5) and (7) the subject is lexical and bears accusative case in spite of the absence of a governing case assigner.

- (5) B'fhearr liom [tú fanacht sa bhaile inniu]
COP -better with-me you remain-VN home today
'I would rather you remain at home today'
- (6) Ba mhaith liom [PRO an doras a phéinteáil]
COP good with-me the door ptc paint-VN
'I would like to paint the door'
- (7) Ba mhaith liom [sibh an doras a phéinteáil]
COP good with-me you-pl the door ptc paint-VN
'I would like you to paint the door'

These data are problematic for the assumption that VSO languages are underlyingly SVO. Because V-movement has not applied, we expect that we should find SVO order, yet as can be seen in (6) and (7) the object precedes the VN. These examples also raise another issue. What is the status of the particle *a* which appears before the VN in the two transitive examples (6) and (7)? Why is it absent in the intransitive example in (5)? Because this particle is associated with the appearance of an object, it seems reasonable to analyze it as an accusative case assigner, and this solution has been proposed by Chung and McCloskey (1987). They propose that VNs are noun-like in that they cannot assign accusative case. Consequently, a case assigning particle *a* adjoins to the VN, and the object adjoins to the V' projection to receive accusative case. This is shown in (8):



Note that this solution explains why *a* only appears when the verb is transitive, and allows us to maintain that the underlying order of the language is SVO. However there are two significant problems with the adjunction analysis. First, it involves A-bar movement of the object for case-assignment, unlike the usual A-movement for case (i.e. passive and raising). Second, it involves adjunction to an X' position, rather than the expected XP or X°. Finally, it cannot account for the word order and case-assignment facts of nonfinite clauses in Southern Dialects as we shall see below.

1.2 Southern Irish Dialects

In Southern dialects also, the subject and the object normally precede the VN in nonfinite clauses (O'Siadhail 1989). However there are several differences between the word order patterns of Northern and Southern dialects. The first concerns the particle *a* which, in Southern dialects, is found whenever a lexical NP, either subject or object, precedes the VN. Thus it intervenes between the subject and the intransitive VN in (9), between the object and the transitive VN in (10), but does not appear in the control structure in (11) which has no lexical NP.

- (9) B'fhearr liom [tú a fanacht sa bhaile inniu]
COP-better with-me you ptc remain-VN home today
'I would rather you remain at home today'
- (10) Ba mhaith liom [PRO an doras a phéinteáil]
COP good with-me the door ptc paint-VN
'I would like to paint the door'
- (11) B'fhearr liom [PRO fanacht sa bhaile inniu]
COP -better with-me remain-VN home today
'I would rather you remain at home today'

In addition, Southern dialects restrict the appearance of lexical NPs preceding the VN to at most one. As a result sentences like that in (12), a transitive clause with a lexical subject, are ungrammatical in Southern dialects, although they are grammatical in the North:

- (12) *Ba mhaith liom [sibh an doras a phéinteáil]
COP good with-me you-pl the door ptc paint-VN
'I would like you to paint the door'

Instead of (12) Southern Irish speakers would tend to use an embedded tensed clause such as the one in (13):

- (13) Ba mhaith liom [gur péinteann sibh an doras]
COP good with-me that paint-pres you-pl the door
'I would like that you paint the door'

Alternatively, in formal registers, the genitive marked object may follow the VN:

- (14) Ba mhaith liom [sibh a phéinteáil an dorais]
COP good with-me you-pl ptc paint-VN the door-GEN
'I would like you to paint the door'

To summarise, in Southern nonfinite clauses:

- (a) The particle *a* appears whenever a lexical NP precedes the VN
(b) Only one lexical NP may precede the VN

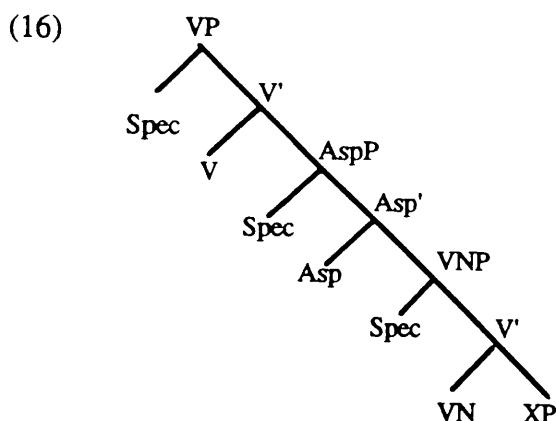
Note that it is not always clear whether the NP which precedes the VN is a subject or an object, leading to ambiguities such as that in (15):

- (15) Ba mhaith liom [tú a phósadh]
COP good with-me you ptc marry
'I would like you to marry/ I would like to marry you'

These data present a challenge to the Principles and Parameters theory of clause structure because in this theory subjects and objects occupy distinct positions at D-structure. How can we state a restriction limiting the lexical realization of NPs to one at most, given that two positions are available for theta-marking? How can we account for the role of *a* which is only associated with lexical NPs? Finally, how can we account for the facts of nonfinite clauses in Northern and Southern Irish in such a way as to capture the differences between the dialects and yet produce the same word order in finite clauses in both dialects? We note that the object adjunction analysis proposed by Chung and McCloskey (1987), does not adequately account for Southern Irish, as the particle *a* is present with both lexical subjects and objects. This casts doubt on the claim that *a* is exclusively associated with accusative case-marking for objects. Furthermore, the object adjunction operation would have to be sensitive to the presence or absence of a subject, given the data in (14), again suggesting that the adjunction analysis is not on the right track. In Section 2 below we will suggest that we can solve these three problems if we assume that the VN is a noun which has an external argument position in Northern Dialects, but not in Southern dialects.

2. New Approaches to VP Structure

A number of recent proposals on the internal structure of VP will be relevant to our discussion. Most important will be the proposals of Travis (1991). Drawing on work by (Larson 1988), she proposes that the VP consists of two segments each of which discharges an argument within its own projection. Following Hale and Keyser (1990) she assumes that the lower VP is headed by a VN. She further proposes that a functional projection AspP intervenes between the two segments of the VP. Under certain circumstances objects move to the Spec of AspP to receive accusative case. Thus the internal structure of VP would be as in (16) below:



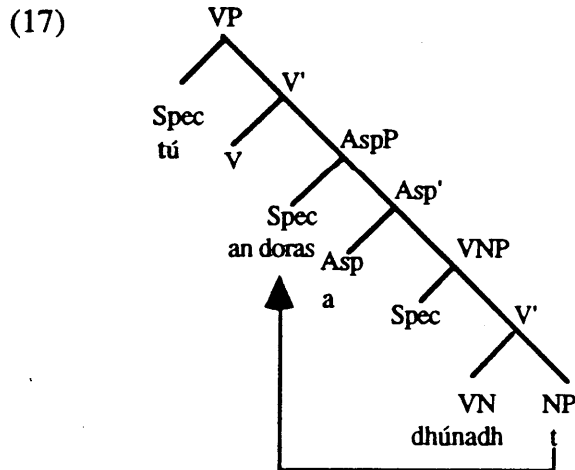
While the VP structure in (16) was not proposed with Irish in mind, in fact the data just discussed presents strong supporting evidence for this type of analysis. We first look at the Northern dialects and see how these proposals can handle the SOV word order and the assignment of accusative case to objects. We will then consider the Southern dialects within this framework.

2.1 The Structure of Irish Finite and Nonfinite VPs

2.1.1 Nonfinite clauses in Northern Dialects

In all dialects the word order is VSO in tensed clauses, and we assume that the VN moves through head of AspP, into V and on to Infl. In nontensed clauses the VN fails

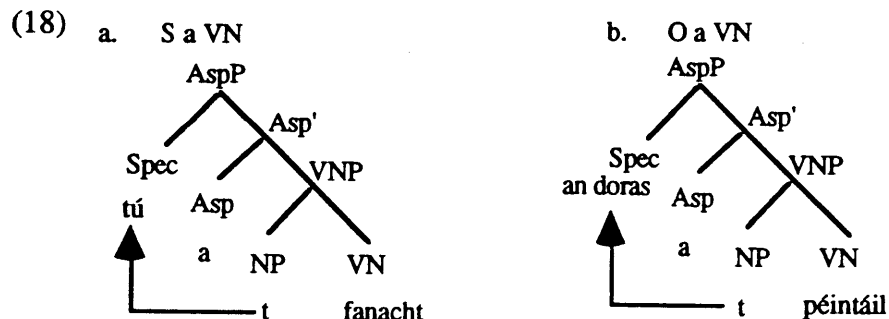
to move. As the VN is a noun and cannot assign accusative case, the object is forced to move to Spec AspP to receive case from *a* in the head of AspP. This is shown in (17) below:



Under this analysis then the VN becomes a true verb only when it incorporates with the higher V in tensed clauses. The failure of V-movement in nonfinite clauses reveals the underlying structure of the VP. This analysis provides us with a means of explaining the intermediate status of the VN as somewhat noun-like but having the argument structure of a verb.

2.1.2 Nonfinite clauses in Southern Dialects

In Southern dialects we assume that tensed clauses have a similar analysis to those in the North, so that the VN moves out of the VP through Asp and V by a series of head-movements. In nontensed clauses, however the situation is different. As in Northern dialects, the VN remains in its D-structure position. However while -Tense subcategorizes for VP in Northern Irish, it subcategorizes for AspP in Southern Irish. The result is that Southern nonfinite clauses do not contain the higher VP projection, and thus have no position for a true external argument. We assume that this constitutes the major difference between nonfinite clauses in the two dialects. The structure of a nonfinite intransitive clause is shown in (18):



In (18a) we have a nonfinite intransitive clause with a lexical subject, and in (18b) we have a transitive control clause. In each of these structures, *a* is a case-assigner generated in the head of AspP. It can assign accusative case to either the subject or the object of the VN. Note that the VN takes a single internal argument in each instance, to which it assigns a theta-role but no case.

This analysis is consistent with the claim that nouns unlike verbs do not have external arguments (Grimshaw 1990). As pointed out by Travis (1991), the reason for the higher V is to discharge the external argument of the VNP. Under the analysis here, the absence of the higher VP results in a restriction on lexical NPs in these clause types; there is only one syntactic position to which an argument may be assigned, Spec of VNP. Note that this also gives us insight into the ambiguity of sentence (15) where the pronoun *tú* 'you' can be interpreted as either an agent or a theme. This ambiguity is similar to that which arises in English nominals such as (19a), where *the enemy* can be interpreted as an agent as in (19b), or as a theme as in (19c).¹

- (19) a. The enemy's destruction
 b. The enemy's destruction of the city
 c. The enemy's destruction by the army

A final issue to be addressed for Southern dialects is the status of the controlled argument in structures such as the example in (10). We will consider this further when we discuss the status of PRO in these dialects in section 4.3 below.

3. Additional Evidence

In a sense, it is not difficult to make a case for treating VNPs as nouns rather than verbs. Traditional grammarians have always done so (The Christian Brothers, 1980, O'Siadhail 1989) and even those who assume that they are verbs rather than nouns assume that they retain nounlike qualities (e.g. genitive case assigning properties) in certain instances. In this section, I look at some of the morphological evidence for treating the VNP as a noun, I then show that our analysis goes part way to explain three long standing puzzles of Irish syntax, and then contrast our analysis with an analysis of Scots Gaelic in Ramchand (1993).

3.1 Morphological evidence: VNP as a 'real noun'

The verbal noun can appear in a variety of different construction types aside from the nonfinite clauses discussed above. Within these structures the nominal characteristics of the VN become quite evident. In various constructions, the VN can bear genitive case, assign genitive case, and appear with nominal emphatic and reflexive affixes. Each of these properties are discussed below.

The VN bears genitive case when it appears with a head noun in structures such as those shown in (20) below:

- | | | | | |
|------|----|---|---|--|
| (20) | a. | fonn troda
desire fight-VN-GEN
'a desire to fight'
(lit. 'fight's desire') | b | lá breithe
day birth-VN-GEN
'birthday' |
|------|----|---|---|--|

The VN can also assign genitive in progressive structures. These are formed by combining the VNP with the verb *a bheith* 'be'. The VNP is preceded by the progressive particle *ag*. In some dialects and registers the NP object (which follows the VN) bears genitive case. In all dialects however, pronominal objects appear as genitive pronouns. This is shown in (21a and b.) below:

- (21) a. Tá sé ag baint an fhéir
be-PRES he ptc cut-VN the grass-GEN
'He is cutting the grass'
(The Christian Brothers 1980)
- b. Tá siad mo mharú
be-PRES they my kill-VN
'They are killing me'

In progressive structures the VNP may be associated with the same emphatic and reflexive morphology as ordinary nouns as can be seen by comparing the progressive structures in (22) with the NPs in (23):

- (22) a. Tá mé mo mharú féin ag obair
be-PRES my kill-VN REFLEX ptc work-VN
'I am killing myself working'
- b. An bhfuil tú á dhéanamh sin le fada?
Q be-PRES you its do-VN EMPH with long
'Have you been doing that for a long time?'
(McCloskey 1983)
- (23) a. mo theach féin 'my own house'
S1 house REFLEX
- b. a theach sin 'that one's house'
MS3 house DEMON
(McCloskey and Hale 1984)

The morphological evidence just discussed here suggests that the VN behaves as a true nominal in progressive structures in that it takes affixes that are normally associated with nouns (see (Guilfoyle 1990) for further discussion). The same VN form heads both nominal and progressive clauses, and the fact that in formal registers the object may bear genitive case suggests that we may treat the VN as a noun in each instance.

3.2 Object Pronoun Postposing

All dialects of Irish have an optional rule of object pronoun postposing to a clause-final position, which can apply in tensed clauses only. Pronominal objects of nonfinite clauses may not be postposed. This can be seen in (24) and (25) below.

- (24) a. Thug mé é do Chiarán i nDoire inniu
give (PAST) I it to in Derry today
'I gave it to Ciaran in Derry today'
- b. Thug mé do Chiarán i nDoire inniu é
give (PAST) I to in Derry today it
'I gave it to Ciaran in Derry today' (Chung and McCloskey 1987)
- (25) a. Níor mhaith liom Ciarán iad a fhostú
I-would-not-like them ptc hire-VN
'I would not like Ciaran to hire them'

VNPS FINITENESS AND EXTERNAL ARGUMENTS

- b. *Níor mhaith liom Ciarán t_i a fhosú iad_i
 I-would-not-like ptc hire-VN them
 'I would not like Ciaran to hire them'

In (24) the pronominal object may appear immediately after the subject as in (24a), or following the object as in (24b). In the nonfinite examples in (25) however, only the example where the pronominal object precedes the VN is acceptable. Under the analysis developed here this contrast is attributable to the ECP, in that the extraction site is not the same in finite and nonfinite clauses. In finite clauses the verb properly governs its object, however, in nonfinite clauses the object occupies the Spec of AspP. AspP is not a proper governor, and thus the pronominal object cannot be extracted.

3.3 The Status of PRO in Modern Irish

Under standard assumptions, we expect that PRO and lexical NPs should be in complementary distribution. This is because lexical NPs must be governed by some case-assigning head, while PRO must not appear in a governed position. As pointed out by Chung & McCloskey (1987), this generalization breaks down in Irish. As we saw in the example in (4), the subject position of Irish nonfinite clauses has a clause-internal mechanism for case-assignment, and yet PRO can also appear there. Under the analysis proposed here, Southern dialects do not have PRO in nonfinite transitive clauses, as there is no syntactic position to which it could be assigned. Rather these control structures should be treated as control of an implicit argument such as has been proposed for English nominals in Williams (1985, 1987). Assuming that this kind of analysis could be generalized to intransitive clauses, we claim that PRO does not appear in Southern Irish at all, so the problem of the lack of complementary distribution between PRO and lexical NPs in Irish disappears, at least for Southern dialects.²

3.4 Northern Double Subject Constructions

Irish has a number of psychological predicates which are formed by combining a bheith 'be' with a noun expressing a psychological state as in (26) below:

- (26) Tá eagla ort
 is fear on-you
 'you are afraid'

These predicates have a number of interesting properties which are discussed in some detail in McCloskey and Sells (1988). Of interest to us here, is the fact that the experiencer argument appears within a PP. When it appears in a nonfinite clause, this experiencer argument can be controlled by a verb in a higher clause as shown in (27):

- (27) Níor cheart duit_i eagla a bheith ort_i
 you_i shouldn't fear ptc be-VN at-you_i
 'You shouldn't be afraid'

Under the analysis proposed by McCloskey and Sells the structure of (27) is as in (28), where the higher verb controls a PRO in subject position of the nonfinite clause, which is in turn co-indexed with the experiencer PP.

- (28) Níor cheart duit_i [PRO_i eagla a bheith ort_i]

In a sense, we could say that the experiencer theta-role is split between the subject position, and the PP position. Note that this analysis gains support from examples such as that in (29), where the subject position is occupied by a lexical NP instead of PRO, and the same coindexation occurs:

- (29) Níor cheart duit_i [tusa_j eagla a bheith ort_i]
 you_i shouldn't you fear ptc be-VN at-you_i
 'You shouldn't be afraid'

Structures such as (29), where the nonfinite subject position is occupied by a lexical NP, are referred to as Double Subject constructions by McCloskey & Sells. They point out that while they are fully grammatical in Northern dialects, in Southern dialects they are not. In Southern Irish only the examples where the subject is not lexically realized are grammatical.

Note that this dialect difference is expected under the analysis proposed here. The Northern dialects have an upper VP and thus external argument position to which a lexical NP can be assigned. The Southern dialects lack this position, so the experiencer argument may be controlled, but not lexically realized as a subject argument.

4. VNPs and Celtic Clause-Structure Under Other Analysis

A number of other researchers have claimed that Celtic languages show evidence of surface VNPs, (Kathman 1991) for Welsh, Guilfoyle (1990a,b) for Irish, and Ramchand (1993) for Scots Gaelic. Here, we briefly consider the analysis of Ramchand (1993) as it is also based on the assumption that Scots Gaelic contains a VNP which contains an AspP. Unlike Travis (1991), and the analysis proposed here, Ramchand does not assume that the VP ever contains an upper VP position, but we argue that the data from Irish nonfinite clauses suggests that such a position is necessary.

4.1 Progressive and Perfective in Scots Gaelic

Ramchand discusses Scots Gaelic (SG) progressive and perfective structures such as those shown in (30) and (31) below:

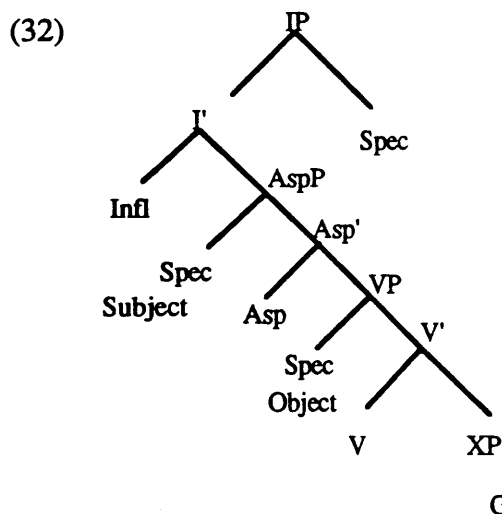
- (30) a. Bha Calum air am balach (a) fhaicinn (perfect)
 Be-past Calum 'air' the boy-dir 'a' see-VN
 Calum had seen the boy'
- b. *Bha Calum air a' bhalaich (a) fhaicinn
 Be-past Calum 'air' the boy-gen 'a' see-VN
 Calum had seen the boy'
- (31) a. Bha Calum a' faicinn a'bhalaich (progressive)
 be-past 'ag' see-VN the boy-gen
 'Calum was seeing the boy'
- b. Bha Calum a' faicinn am balach
 be-past 'ag' see-VN the boy-dir
 'Calum was seeing the boy'

These structures consist of the verb 'be' in combination with a VN preceded by either *ag* 'progressive', or *air* 'perfective'. Like Travis, Ramchand is primarily concerned with the role of the AspP, and its effect on the interpretation of objects. She argues that the SG

VNPS FINITENESS AND EXTERNAL ARGUMENTS

structures present evidence for a VP internal AspP, such as that proposed by Travis (1991). However, unlike Travis she assumes that there is no higher VP, rather the subject is generated in Spec of AspP. Furthermore, Asp is not a landing site for derived objects, rather the object is generated in either Spec VP or as the complement to the V. When it is generated in Spec of VP, it is governed by the AspP, and a perfective interpretation is forced. Thus she makes the claims shown in (a) to (d) below and proposes a structure like that shown in (32):

- (a) Asp is part of the phrase structure.
- (b) In periphrastic constructions the projection has actual phonological content: ag when Asp is [-perf] and air when Asp is [+perf].
- (c) In simple tenses the verb raises through Asp to Infl and carries [+perf] specification.
- (d) When the object appears in accusative case it is in the Spec of VP governed by Asp, when it is in the genitive case it is the complement of the VN.



The structure in (32) is somewhat similar to the structure we propose for Southern Irish. Note however, that unlike our analysis of Southern Irish, Ramchand's analysis of Scots Gaelic involves the assignment of an external argument to the Spec of AspP. We argue below that this kind of analysis will not work for Modern Irish, and is not desirable for theory internal reasons.

4.2 The External Argument and the Upper VP

Ramchand's analysis differs from that presented here in that

- (i) There is never an upper VP
- (ii) The external argument is base-generated in Spec AspP
- (iii) Objects may be generated either in Spec VNP or as the complement to the VN depending on whether they appear in the direct or genitive cases.

Some of the facts of Irish progressive and perfective structures could be captured under this analysis. In particular, the suggestion that objects may be generated in either Spec of VNP or as the complement of VN could well be carried over to Irish³ However there are serious problems for the claim that the external argument is generated in Spec of AspP rather than in the Spec of an upper VP.

First, the assignment of a theta-role to the Spec of AspP involves theta-assignment to the Spec of a functional category, the only instance of this in the grammar, all other theta-roles being discharged within the projection of a lexical head.⁴ Second, there is independent evidence from a number of languages that the external argument is assigned by a light verb to its Spec position (Travis 1991, Hale and Keyser 1990), and that in some languages this light verb is lexically realized (Travis 1991). Under the assumption that theta assignment is constrained by universal principles, we expect that external arguments will be realized in the same way cross-linguistically.

The contrast between the behaviour of subjects in Southern Irish nonfinite clauses and Northern Irish nonfinite clauses, suggests that the significant difference between these dialects is the presence or absence of this higher VP. The fact that Southern Irish dialects allow only one lexical argument to appear in nonfinite clauses suggests that they are competing for a single syntactic position in this dialect. If we were to assume that both a subject and an object position is available in Southern dialects of Irish we would be unable to explain the restrictions on lexical subjects in the dialect.

Finally in Guilfoyle (1990ab) I propose that Irish progressive structures are light verb structures headed by a VN. In these structures the VN is a deficient theta-marker in the sense of Grimshaw and Mester (1988), and requires the assistance of a light verb *bheith* 'be' to discharge one of its arguments. The analysis of nonfinite clauses proposed here is consistent with this analysis. The VN, like other nouns, is not able to discharge an external argument, but must participate in a light verb construction - either with the empty light verb of the upper VP as in Northern nonfinite clauses, or with the overt light verb *bheith* as in progressive structures in both dialects. In nonfinite clauses the upper VP (argued to be a type of light verb by Travis) is not present in Southern dialects, leading to some of the ambiguities we have seen.

5. Passive Infinitivals in Old English

5.0 Introduction

The claim that Southern Irish nonfinite clauses should be handled as VNPs rather than VPs raises the issue of whether VNPs appear in other languages without the upper VP in nonfinite clauses. In this section we consider the evidence that some infinitival verbs in Old English (OE) were also VNs. This idea is not new, in the sense that both traditional and generative grammarians have claimed that the OE infinitivals are nominal forms. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that historically the OE infinitival form evolved from a Germanic nominal form (Wright and Wright 1925). At which point in the history of English it became a true verb is not clear. Furthermore it is not clear whether *all* infinitival clauses in Old English were headed by VNPs, or only a subset of them. Lightfoot (1979) working in a framework predating Government Binding theory, proposes that all Old English infinitival forms were NPs, and gives several arguments to this effect. We think this may well be true but in what follows, we focus on the infinitival complements of OE causative and perception verbs.

5.1 Infinitival Forms in Old English

OE verbs can be divided into a strong and weak declension, each of these declensions have two active infinitival forms. The first type, shown in (33a), consists of a

bare infinitival form, the second type, shown in (33b), consists of an infinitival form preceded by the preposition *to*.

- (33) a. hieran 'to hear' singan 'to sing'
b. to hierenne 'to hear' to singenne 'to sing'

There is no difference in meaning between these two forms, though some verbs restrict their complements to one form rather than another (Mitchell 1985). The *to* infinitival form replaced the bare form in most contexts during the Middle English period.

Both of these infinitival forms are descendants of a Germanic nominal form, and they retain the nominal morphology (Callaway 1913), (Wright and Wright 1925). The *-an* bare form is 'the petrified nominative-accusative case of a neuter verbal noun' (Callaway 1913:387), while the *-enne* appearing with the *to* form is a dative case ending.

5.2 OE Causative and Perception verbs

OE causative and perception verbs (like their Modern English counterparts) only take bare infinitival complements, and never take *to* infinitival complements. Furthermore, this bare infinitival complement sometimes has a passive interpretation. OE has a passive infinitival form, consisting of the verbs *beon/wesan* 'be' or (ge) *weorþan* 'become' followed by a past participle. However, in spite of the availability of these passive infinitival forms in the language, they never appear as the complements of causative and perception verbs. Rather, the active bare infinitival form is used, but the interpretation can be passive. Some examples of OE causative and perception verbs with infinitival complements are shown in (34) below (from Lightfoot (1990:91)):

- (34) a. he let cnihtas læran
he let boys teach
'he had boys taught' (Bede)
- b. ðonne heo gehyrdon þine bec rædan & þin godspell sæcgan
then they heard you books read and your gospel say
'then they heard your books read and your gospel'
- c. þa hie gesawan þa deaðan men þiclice to eorþan beran
when they saw the dead men often to earth bear
'when they saw the dead men carried so often to earth' (Orosius)

Each of these infinitival forms has a passive interpretation, yet the verb form is active. The analysis of these structures has generated a lot of discussion in the traditional literature on OE, most of which centres on whether or not they really are passives. For example, Callaway (1913), proposes that they are passives, while Mitchell (1985) concludes they are active, but they are used in a passive sense. Using a GB approach Lightfoot (1990) proposes that these structures are active forms with an arbitrary PRO subject, and can be analyzed as shown in (35):

- (35) he let [PRO cnihtas læran]

Note that lexical NPs can also occupy the subject position of these infinitival complements:

- (36) he let itt eomenn forwipþ
he let it run forthwith (Orm) Lightfoot (1990:82)

As we saw in Section 4.3 for Modern Irish, this leads us to the problem of the lack of complementary distribution between PRO and lexical NPs in the language. PRO and lexical NP subjects should never occupy the same position, given that they have different requirements with respect to government.

We avoid this problem if we assume that the internal structure of infinitival complements of causative and perception verbs in OE are similar to that of nonfinite clauses in Southern Irish. They are headed by a VN whose Spec position may be occupied by either an agent or a theme. In other words, the structure of (34a) is as in (37)

(37) he let [VN_{PC}nihtas læran]

Cnihtas is a theme in this structure, however in another context it could be interpreted as an agent, and example (34a) could mean 'he had boys teach'. This is similar to the ambiguity in Southern Irish nonfinite clauses discussed in Section 1.2 above. While we make the conservative assumption that other types of OE infinitival clauses consisted of a full VP as in Northern Irish and Modern English, further research may reveal that a bare VNP analysis may be appropriate for all OE infinitivals. We note that Exceptional Case Marking of the subject of infinitivals was not possible in Old English, and that infinitival clauses allowed only control subjects. This would be predictable under the assumption that the clause was headed by a VNP, and so lacked an external argument position. Exceptional Case Marking emerged as an option in Middle English, roughly simultaneous with the emergence of *to* infinitives (Lightfoot 1979). Under our analysis this would be argued to be the time where there was a shift from a bare VNP structure to the full bipartite VP structure of Modern English.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued on the basis of evidence from nonfinite clauses in Modern Irish, that the VP is a bipartite structure where the lower maximal projection is headed by a verbal noun, and that the VP contains a functional category AspP. We used these two assumptions to explain the word order of Irish nonfinite clauses, and the differences between the admissibility of subjects in nonfinite clauses in Northern and Southern dialects of Irish. We argued that our analysis has advantages over that of Ramchand's analysis of Scots Gaelic and we showed that it can be extended to explain some of the properties of the infinitival complements of causative and perception verbs in Old English.

* The research for this paper has been supported by a grant from the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada (grant #410-91-1956). I would like to thank John Archibald, Naomi Cull, Betsy Ritter and Hooi Ling Soh for comments and discussion. Thanks also to Robert Murray for helpful discussion of the Old English data. All errors remain my own. Some of this research was presented at The Workshop on Lexical Syntactic Relations at McGill University in 1992. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society 1993, and appears in the proceedings.

¹ It has been pointed out to me that a theme interpretation is the most natural in these instances, I am not sure if that is also the case for the Irish example in (15).

² It would also be possible to extend this kind of analysis to Northern dialects, but we cannot discuss this here for reasons of space.

³ See Duffield (1991) Guilfoyle (1990) for alternative analyses of Irish progressives.

⁴ Note that there is evidence that aspect can affect theta-assignment to the object in terms of affectedness, but the claim here is that the subject not the object is generated in the Spec of AspP.

VNPS FINITENESS AND EXTERNAL ARGUMENTS

References

- Bobaljik, J. & A. Carnie 1992 'A Minimalist approach to some Problems of Irish Word Order' paper presented at the XIIth Harvard Celtic Colloquium.
- The Christian Brothers 1980. New Irish Grammar. Dublin: C. J. Fallon Ltd.
- Callaway, M. 1913. The Infinitive in Anglo-Saxon. Carnegie Institution.
- Chung, S., & McCloskey, J. 1987. 'Government, Barriers and Small Clauses in Modern Irish'. Linguistic Inquiry, 18: 2, 173-238.
- Duffield, N. 1991 Particles and Projections. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Southern California
- Emonds, J. 1980. 'Word Order in Generative Grammar'. Journal of Linguistic Research, 1.
- Grimshaw, J. 1990. Argument Structure. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.
- Grimshaw, J. & A. Mester 1988. 'Light verbs and theta-marking' Linguistic Inquiry 19, 205-232.
- Guilfoyle, E. 1990a. Light verbs passives and A-chains in Irish. In Proceedings of the Xth Harvard Celtic Colloquium. Harvard University:
- Guilfoyle, E. 1990b Functional Categories and Phrase Structure Parameters. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McGill University.
- Hale, K. & Keyser, J. 1990. 'The syntactic character of thematic structure'. Unpublished ms. MIT.
- Kathman, D. 1991. The Categorical Status of the Welsh Verbal Noun. University of Chicago Working Papers in Linguistics, 7, 103-135.
- Larson, R. 1988. 'On the Double Object Construction'. Linguistic Inquiry, 19, 335-393.
- Lightfoot, D. 1990. How to Set Parameters: Arguments from Language Change. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.
- Lightfoot, D. W. 1979. Principles of Diachronic Syntax. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCloskey, J. 1983. 'A VP in a VSO language'. Dordrecht: Foris.
- McCloskey, J., & Hale, K. 1984. On the Syntax of Person-Number Inflection in Modern Irish. Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, 14, 487-535.
- McCloskey J. & P. Sells. 1988 'Control and A-Chains in Modern Irish.' Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, 6: 143-190.
- Mitchell, B. 1985. Old English Syntax. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- O'Siadhail, M. 1989. Modern Irish: Grammatical Structure and Dialectal Variation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ramchand, G. C. 1992. Aspect Phrase in Modern Scottish Gaelic. Paper presented at NELS XXIII. University of Ottawa.
- Sproat, R. 1985 'Welsh Syntax and VSO Structure' Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, Vol 3, 173-216.
- Travis, L. 1991. Inner Aspect and the Structure of VP. In NELS, XXII. University of Delaware: GLSA, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Williams, E. 1985. PRO and the subject of NP. Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, 3, 297-316.
- Williams, E. 1987. Implicit arguments, the binding theory, and control. Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, 5, 151-180.
- Wright, J. & Wright, E. M. 1925. Old English Grammar. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

